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SUBJECT: JAFARI NOMINATION VARIOUSLY GREETED WITH PRAISE, DISBELIEF,
DEBATE IN SOUTH CENTRAL IRAQ

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CLASSIFIED BY: GARY ANDERSON, ACTING REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO,
AL-HILLAH, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The selection of Ibrahim Jafari as the choice of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) to serve as Prime Minister of the new Iraqi government was greeted by widely divergent reactions across South Central Iraq. Most Shi'a Islamist contacts praised Jafari, even as some UIA constituent group partisans, such as members of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), expressed their surprise. Many contacts praised the man Jafari bested for the post, SCIRI Official Adel Abdul Mehdi. Most contacts credited Sadrists for securing the candidacy for Jafari, while Islamists and secularists differed widely on Jafari's prospects in the Council of Representatives (CoR) and his job performance to date. End summary.

NAJAF: UIA ACCEPTS JAFARI, DEBATES MINISTERIAL ASSIGNMENTS

¶2. (C) Najaf Shi'a Islamists view the Jafari nomination as a victory for the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) and the Shi'a, and most treat his confirmation by the Council of Representatives (CoR) as a foregone conclusion. Najaf Islamic Dawa Member Dr. Majeed Zaini praised Jafari and maintained that the current Prime Minister enjoys widespread popular support. Sayid Riyadh Baher Al-Aloum, a Najaf Provincial Council (PC) member, credited Jafari's attempts to bring the Sunnis into the political process with creating "widespread acceptance" for his candidacy. The head of the student union in the College of Economics at Kufa University, Firas Abdul Ameer, a moderate Sadrist, praised Jafari and related that Adel Abdul Mehdi's perceived support for semi-autonomous regional governments made him less popular than Jafari, who supports maintaining one united Iraq.

¶3. (C) The Najaf spokesman for the Fadhila Party, Hassan Hussein Allwan, praised the selection process as "legal and democratic." Allwan reported that the withdrawal of Fadhila Party Leader Dr. Nadim Al-Jabiri, who, he said, ceded the nomination rather than make broad ministerial concessions, sealed Jafari's bid for the Prime Minister post. Allwan maintained that support for Jafari within the UIA was "widespread." He argued that those unhappy with the current state of Iraq generally blame difficult circumstances rather than Jafari's personal performance.

¶4. (C) One secular politician, however, citing the close vote within the UIA to select Jafari and what he described as Jafari's poor performance as Prime Minister to date, speculated that the "fragile" UIA consensus on Jafari might not hold. Abdul Al Al-Essawi, the Najaf leader of the Iraqi National Accord

(INA), offered that, "we still believe that Jafari's selection will cause friction within the UIA." He maintained that Mehdi was more popular outside of the UIA, especially among the Kurds, and that Jafari's selection would exacerbate sectarian tensions, particularly between Sunni and Shi'a.

15. (C) With most Islamists resigned to Jafari's assumption of the Prime Ministership, much speculation focused on ministerial portfolio assignments. Zaini, the Dawa representative, reported that the UIA had already formed committees to both internally vet minister candidates and to negotiate assignments and candidates with other parties in the CoR. Allwan, the Fadhila spokesman, avowed that Jalal Talabani had already been selected to serve as President, that Iyad Allawi was likely to become Defense Minister, that the UIA would maintain the Interior and Oil posts, with Oil going to Fadhila, and that a Kurd would become Minister of Foreign Affairs. Al-Aloum predicted that the UIA would maintain Interior, that Defense and Trade would go to the Sunnis, Oil would go to an independent such as Mithal Al-Alousi, and that a Kurd would become Vice President. The moderate Sadrists offered that the Shi'a and Kurds would retain all key ministries with minor posts such as those of Transportation and Human Rights left to the Sunnis.

KARBALA: JAFARI'S BID LIKELY SECURE

16. (C) Karbala contacts reported that the selection of Jafari is likely to hold, but that intense jockeying would ensue over support for Jafari in exchange for ministerial appointments. Shaykh Ali Komonna, a former governor, political independent and prominent tribal leader, pointed to the Sadrists as the key to Jafari's selection. He reported that Sadrists used harsh propaganda to discredit Jafari competitors Mehdi and Al-Jabiri of the Fadhila Party, such as the circulation of documents alleging a connection between Mehdi and the Baathists and pro-Saddam Hussein articles allegedly written by Al-Jabiri. Komonna predicted that in spite of alienating Fadhila members

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with such tactics, Jafari would remain the UIA's choice. Karbala Editor Ali Al-Janabi, also an independent, argued that Jafari will become the next Prime Minister and offered that the UIA would control over half of the ministerial positions.

DIWANIYAH: SCIRI SHOCK AT JAFARI SELECTION

17. (C) In Diwaniyah, surprise, and in some cases shared condolences, greeted the selection by the UIA of Jafari to be Prime Minister. Shaykh Hussein Al-Khalidi, Diwaniyah Head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), allowed that "of course I cannot deny that all indications were giving the [nomination] to Dr. Adel [Abdul Mehdi.]" Dr. Haider Hamza Obaid, a religious independent, maintained that "many people were surprised, because the media and the public pointed to Mehdi as the most likely candidate." Obaid said that many of his friends with close ties to SCIRI offered one another condolences upon hearing the news. Obaid also reported that Diwaniyah tribal leaders were unsatisfied with the selection. Liberals concurred. Dr. Mazen Lilo, a law professor at Qadisiyah University, offered that "most of the people were looking for another person."

18. (C) All contacts, religious and secular, credited the Sadrists with offering Jafari the support he needed to outpoll Mehdi among the UIA. Farhan Murad, the political editor of Diwaniyah newspaper, cited the connection Sadrists feel with Jafari's Dawa Party because Dawa's founder, Mohammed Baqr Al-Sadr, is an uncle of Moqtada Al-Sadr. Others cited the belief that Mehdi, were he to become Prime Minister, would grant Kirkuk to the Kurds, an act opposed by Sadr. And many contacts, religious and secular, noted their belief that Mehdi was the early favorite because of widespread public perceptions that he would be more favorable to the international community and to

the United States.

¶9. (C) Still, UIA contacts maintained that Jafari would be a strong Prime Minister. But most contacts, secular and religious, agreed that the issue is not yet over. Shaykh Hussein, of SCIRI, described Jafari as a strong leader and said that any failures attributed to him from his current stint as Prime Minister were the fault of circumstances beyond Jafari's control. (Note: Shaykh Hussein is a savvy politician and likely praised Jafari to REO Al-Hillah staff in large part to maintain a united UIA front before a U.S. government official. End note.) He added, "there is a small chance that the Council of Representatives will not vote Jafari in, and in that case Dr. Adel Abdul Mehdi will be the next choice." Shaykh Hussein was firm in stating that the Prime Minister, whether Jafari or Mehdi, must be from the UIA and at least half of the key governmental positions and ministries must go to UIA members. Saad Madhloom, Diwanayah Head of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) and a political independent, said that the real test of Jafari's candidacy would take place outside of the UIA, on the floor of the CoR. "No one can say it is finished," he avowed.

BABIL: JAFARI'S HARDLINE ON KIRKUK SEALS BID

¶10. (C) Babil Province officials and observers generally praised the Jafari nomination and predicted dire consequences were he to fail to gain the post. Kadhum Majeed Tomam, a Sadrist member of the Babil Provincial Council, praised Jafari for his strict stance against yielding Kirkuk to the Kurds, an act that many contacts across the region suggested that Jafari's competitor, Mehdi, would consider. Saad Al-Haddad, a pro-UIA journalist with Al-Hillah-based newspaper Al-Fayhaa, praised Jafari in almost the exact same words, calling the Prime Minister "more strict," a description also used by Babil Communist Party Head Dr. Ali Abdul Kareem, who favored the nomination of Mehdi because of his flexibility.

¶11. (C) Others, while expecting the Jafari nomination, preferred the alternative. Bassem Jassem Al-Humaidi, a member of the Transitional National Assembly from the UIA slate who did not win a seat in the current CoR, offered that, "I wouldn't have hesitated for one minute to chose Mehdi." He reported that he favored Mehdi because of his perceived flexibility, versus the strictness of Jafari. Because of this, Al-Humaidi maintained, Mehdi is more capable of dealing with the Kurds and Sunnis, and is more acceptable to the international community.

¶12. (C) None of the contacts saw much chance of Jafari failing to win the position. Tomam maintained that there was "zero expectations" that the CoR would not approve Jafari. Dr. Ali, the Communist leader, conceded that the Prime Minister should be a member of the UIA, and said that Jafari has a "great chance" to win the post. He predicted a "parliamentary crisis" if Jafari did not. Al-Haddad, the journalist, related that a surprise was

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not unthinkable in the political machinations surrounding the Prime Ministership, but said that if Jafari is not approved by the CoR, "the whole political process is going to fall apart."

WASIT FADHILA AND INA: JAFARI'S BARGAINS WILL NOT HOLD

¶13. (C) In Wasit, CoR representatives both inside and outside the UIA doubted that Jafari's victory would last. Basim Sharif, presently a Fadhila TNA member and incoming CoR member, expressed his skepticism over the UIA's selection of Jafari. In Sharif's opinion, SCIRI's Mehdi is still well positioned to emerge as the UIA's nominee. Though he conceded that Jafari's negotiating skill is formidable, he avowed that the Sadrist and Shi'a independent support that carried the day for Jafari is too unstable to be relied upon in the long term. According to Sharif, Jafari's selection cannot withstand the pressure of negotiation with Kurds, Sunnis and secularists in the search for

a governing majority in the CoR. Sharif asserted that the poor record of the current Jafari government in providing basic services and security and his weak record as an administrator would eventually cause the tide to turn against the Prime Minister.

¶14. (C) Shaykh Jamal Al-Batik, the sole Allawi list representative from Wasit in the CoR, speculated that Jafari had offered a cabinet position to a member of the Wasit UIA list in order to gain their support. (Note: The Wasit UIA slate won seven of Wasit's eight allocated CoR seats. End note.) According to his (unconfirmed) information, Jafari offered Mohammed Al-Khateeb, the Wasit Deputy Governor and lead Wasit UIA candidate in the December 2005 election, a ministerial level position in a Jafari-led government. In spite of these efforts by Jafari, Al-Batik argued, his nomination would not survive. Al-Batik speculated that the Sadrists' refusal to cooperate with Allawi and his supporters, a seemingly necessary plank in the formation of a national unity government, would shatter the UIA coalition, and Jafari's support, and open the door to another nominee.

ANDERSON